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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 001017

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [RS](#) [UP](#) [LH](#)

SUBJECT: UPDATE ON SU-27 CRASH INVESTIGATION

REF: A. VILNIUS 977

[B](#). VILNIUS 993

[C](#). SECSTATE 176092

[D](#). VILNIUS 1012

Classified By: Political/Economic Officer Alexander Titolo for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) The GOL's leadership continued to take a softer line on September 26 on the crash of a Russian Su-27 in Lithuania on September 15 (ref A). A senior briefer stated today that the GOL has "no evidence" that Russia intentionally violated Lithuanian airspace. Work on decoding the black boxes is proceeding with the assistance of technical experts from Ukraine. The GOL does not foresee a formal request to NATO for assistance. The Russian pilot remains in Lithuania, but the Government is working intensively to release the pilot promptly. The head of the crash investigation said Russian observers are present for all stages of the inquiry, but that the Russian Government has not been "fully cooperative." Senior Government officials stated that this incident should raise serious concerns for Lithuania, NATO, and the EU about dangers stemming from the threadbare state of Russia's military, poor coordination of Russia's armed exercises near Lithuania's borders, and careless Russian actions such as switching off transponders in areas used by civil aviation. They promised to raise the issue for appropriate discussion in NATO, and possibly in the NATO-Russian Council. End Summary.

STATUS OF THE INVESTIGATION AND PILOT

2. (SBU) MOD Undersecretary Renatas Norkus, in a September 26 briefing to NATO and EU ambassadors, echoed the earlier public statement of Defense Minister Gediminas Kirkilas (ref D) that evidence collected so far indicates that the crash of the Su-27 in Lithuania was an accident. (Note: This marks a considerable soft-peddling of Kirkilas's earlier charge that the incident could have been a deliberate provocation. Kirkilas told the Ambassador September 23 that he had done so to improve the atmosphere with Moscow. End note.) Norkus said that work on the black box is underway with the assistance of four experts from Ukraine. (The GOL originally requested French assistance, but turned to the Ukrainians while the French Government was still considering its response.) Brigadier General Vitalijus Vaiksnoras, head of the commission appointed to investigate the cause of the crash, told the ambassadors that the information on the black box has been successfully retrieved, and the experts are now working to translate the data into useable information.

3. (C) The Ambassador asked the GOL briefers about the status of the investigation and the anticipated timing of the release of the Russian pilot. Vaiksnoras tied the pilot's status to the investigation, saying that at the current rate of progress, the inquiry should finish soon. He pointed out, however, that the investigatory commission is still awaiting information from the Russian government, which ties the fate of the pilot to the level of Russian cooperation. (GOL leaders tell us privately that they are eager to remove the pilot's situation as a source of contention, and expect the Prosecutor General to agree to release the pilot within a matter of days.)

NO REQUEST FOR NATO HELP FORTHCOMING

4. (SBU) The Acting Director of the MFA's Security Policy Department Algis Dabkus told the assembled ambassadors that NATO has been "very supportive" of Lithuania, and that the GOL had especially appreciated the Ambassador's September 23 statement of support. Vaiksnoras said that the GOL has received all the assistance it needs from its NATO allies, and does not plan to formally request NATO technical assistance. (That does not mean, however, that the GOL will not want to pursue "lessons learned" exercises in appropriate NATO fora.) Specifically, Norkus said Lithuania would be eager for discussion of the incident within NATO and possibly later in the NATO-Russia Council.

RUSSIA "NOT COOPERATIVE"

15. (SBU) All three briefers made note of the lack of cooperation they perceive from the Russian side. Specifically, they said that Russia has refused to explain why missiles and radioactive material were on the plane. Vaiksnoras said that the GOL had asked the Russians on or about September 19 a number of questions and the Russians had so far refused to respond. Norkus expanded on this point to highlight GOL security concerns that this event has brought to the fore. He cited the poor state and chaotic organization of Russia's armed forces in general and specific concerns about the conduct of armed exercises so close to Lithuania. Dabkus said that Minister Lavrov called Foreign Minister Valionis to say that the intergovernmental commission that Russia canceled last week in response to Lithuania's actions in this case should be rescheduled for the "nearest future."

COMMENT

16. (C) GOL officials are easing their foot off of the rhetorical pedal in order to calm the diplomatic waters. Our success in eliciting supportive comments from NATO headquarters about the potential for follow-up reviews of the incident and our supportive comments in the press here helped to give the GOL room to defuse the confrontation with Russia. The basic concerns of the national security establishment here about what the incident says about Russia's intentions and capabilities, however, are as strongly felt as ever.

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